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RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE PRIORITY 4250  
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN PRIORITY 1678  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUCPDOG/USDOC WASHDC PRIORITY 1527  
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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN ELECTIONS #13: A REALIGNMENT IN CONGRESS  
AND THE MUNICIPALITIES

1. (U) This is the 13th cable in a series reporting on the  
Dominican Republic's May 16 congressional and municipal  
elections:

2006 Elections - A Realignment in Congress and the  
Municipalities

The ruling PLD of President Leonel Fernandez won the May 16  
congressional and municipal elections by a wider margin than  
expected -- so much so that the margin of victory suggests a  
realignment of political forces in the Dominican Republic.

Nearly complete returns were published by the Central  
Elections Board (JCE) in its bulletin #17 of May 23. Turnout  
may have been higher than expected, and the few deaths blamed  
on election-related incidents did not substantially exceed  
the record in previous mid-term elections.

Although not final, the congressional vote totals so far show  
the PLD far ahead of either of the main opposition parties:  
about 52% of the electorate voted for the PLD and allies, 22%  
for the PRD and allies, and 23% for the PRSC and allies, with  
independent minor parties picking up the residual. According  
to local commentators, with its 2004 and 2006 electoral gains  
the PLD has displaced the PRD as the party with the largest  
voter base.

This will support President Fernandez's chances of winning a  
third term in 2008, if he decides to run. Both he and his  
chief of staff Danilo Medina get credit within the party for  
a successful campaign strategy, prominently featuring weeks  
of street campaigning by the head of state. One PRSC leader  
in Congress told political officer May 22 that, as of now,  
"There is no one in the opposition who could successfully  
challenge Fernandez in 2008. Those who aspire will look to  
2012."

The PLD appears to have won absolute control of Congress, giving Fernandez leverage to get approval for his proposals -- suggesting that legislation on good governance will move ahead. According to the preliminary returns, the PLD has won 20 of the 32 Senate seats and is ahead for two others; the PRD has won 6 and the PRSC 4. If this result is confirmed, the Fernandez administration will have the 2/3 majority needed to pass constitutional amendments in the Senate. His PLD may also achieve a simple majority in the House of Representatives, enough to pass ordinary legislation. An unpublished JCE projection obtained by the Embassy shows 92 seats for the PLD (of 178), 42 for the PRSC, and 40 for the PRD. The PLD will chair both houses as of the opening session of the new Congress on August 16.

The ruling party also did very well in the municipal elections. As of May 23, the PLD has won or is ahead in 67 of the 151 municipalities, the PRD in 52, the PRSC in 28, and minor parties in the remainder. Each mayor comes with a party list of city council candidates; council members are chosen in proportion to each party's vote total. As in the Congress, the municipal election outcome will radically change the balance of party control: the PLD, now in control of only 7 towns, may soon have like-minded leaders in nearly half, facilitating cooperation between central and local governments on public works and delivery of benefits to the inhabitants.

#### Election Count Continues

As in previous elections, the Dominican Republic experienced significant problems in counting the votes according to a

legally mandated system that is complicated, laden with time-consuming security procedures, and reliant on error-prone human beings to prepare hand-written and calculated tallies subsequently entered into computers. The losers, inevitably suspicious because of a history of election frauds into the 1990s, have already submitted the first of what are likely to be many challenges to results in specific localities.

Prominent USAID-supported civic organization Participacion Ciudadana, which fielded national observers of the election, reminded the public on May 24 that the parties have a right to challenge results believed to be inaccurate and asked that the challenges be well documented. The group also urged the parties not to engage in protests or other disruptive tactics that could raise tension, and to prepare to accept the final results as determined by the JCE.

JCE administrative chamber president Nelson Gomez announced that, beginning May 25, the municipal boards would begin hearing challenges and requests for correction of widespread adding errors and other mistakes on the tally sheets prepared by poll workers on election night. The boards would have up to five days to resolve the challenges; the JCE would serve as a court of appeal if necessary. Political officer has seen egregious examples of bad math and a few of what might have been intentional changes to alter results.

As of May 23, the vote count was still incomplete, with municipal election boards in two provinces working to correct the tallies. The JCE plenary May 22 strongly invited the remaining boards to submit their results within 24 hours; the JCE subsequently anticipated releasing complete provisional returns on May 24. Opposition leaders and candidates asserted to political officer that the errors consistently favored the ruling party, and threatened a trench-to-trench battle to push things their way in provinces and municipalities where the PLD edge is relatively thin. This strategy, while understandable, will nonetheless drag out the final determination of the winners while the election boards adjudicate challenges -- particularly in the numerous races for representative and mayor.

## What Path for the Opposition?

The opposition parties are talking about internal reforms to revitalize the parties that dominated Dominican politics for more than 40 years. This election was primarily a defeat for the PRD. The party that won three straight elections -- in 1998, 2000, and 2002 -- lost the presidency in 2004 and now in 2006 its legislative and municipal dominance. The anti-PRD vote is attributed by many to the continuing widespread voter disapproval of ex-president Mejia, who left office in 2004 amid financial crisis, corruption scandals, and a failed effort at re-election. Some Embassy contacts believe Mejia's influence will wane after the electoral defeat, and some hope the current PRD and PRSC party officers will resign or be forced to do so.

The PRSC of deceased president Balaguer had already hit a low point in 2004, when its presidential candidate Eduardo Estrella got less than 9 percent of the vote. This time, the PRSC elected additional senators, representatives, and mayors, and Reformista leader Amable Aristy Castro handily won the senate seat from La Altagracia and aspires to run for president. However, the PRSC's gains are in large part attributable to its alliance with the PRD. Not counting allies, the PRSC received only 11% of the vote -- barely more than the 9% PRSC vote in the 2004 presidential election. An

unknown but considerable number of Reformista voters, unhappy over the alliance, abstained or absconded, and their future party affiliation is in doubt.

Both opposition parties are in a shambles; their "Grand National Alliance" failed to reverse their decline. PRD secretary general Orlando Jorge Mera told political officer

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May 17 that the elections "damaged the system of political parties. We need to pass a good political party law, requiring greater transparency and discouraging candidates from switching parties opportunistically." Renegade Senator "Tonty" Rutinel, who renounced his PRD membership before the elections, predicted profound changes and "a total recomposition" in the parties.

As if to underscore that need, local daily Diario Libre on May 24 ran a front-page photo of two re-elected congressmen, all smiles, congratulating each other. One was Radhames Ramos Garcia (PRD) of La Vega, re-elected despite the fact that last year the Supreme Court convicted him of alien smuggling and he served 9 months of an 18-month prison sentence.

12. (U) Drafted by Bainbridge Cowell.

13. (U) This piece and others in our series can be consulted at our SIPRNET web site (<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo>) along with extensive other material.  
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